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## MISCELLANY

### THE EARLIEST KNOWN MESOPOTAMIAN TRAVELLER IN AMERICA

*An account of a journey into America, in the years 1668-1683, by the Rev. Elias Hanna, a Chaldean Catholic priest of the Diocese of Mossoul, in Mesopotamia.*

It was somewhat of a surprise to the writer a few years ago when he came across in the Arabic monthly, *Al-Mashriq* (*The Orient*), published by the Jesuit Fathers of the University of Beyrouth, Syria, a series of articles describing the journey of a Catholic Chaldean priest to America in the years 1668-1683. No one had ever suspected that a Catholic priest, hailing from the distant cities of Mossoul and Bagdad, and as early as 1668, and with the explicit approbation of the Spanish government and the recommendation of the Holy See, should or could have undertaken such a long, arduous and perilous journey to the New World. It had long been the intention of the present writer to publish an English translation of this remarkable Arabic manuscript, but the difficulty of identifying the hundreds of Spanish and South American geographical and personal names, so carelessly transliterated and so badly disfigured in their Arabic form, deterred him from the undertaking. However, at the request of the Rev. Dr. Guilday he submits here a brief sketch of the contents of the work in the hope that it may prove of interest to the readers of the CATHOLIC HISTORICAL REVIEW.

The manuscript in question was discovered in 1905, in the episcopal library of the Syrian Catholic Church in Aleppo, Syria, by a Jesuit Father, Antoun Rabbât, and published by him in the *Mashriq*. (Vol. viii, pp. 821ff, 875ff, 931ff, 974ff, 1022ff, 1080ff and 1118ff.) It is about 8 by 6 inches in size, containing 269 pages, 21 lines to the page. The narrative of the journey proper occupies the first one hundred pages. From pp. 100-214 we have a short history, in 17 chapters, of the discovery of America and a description of its inhabitants, customs, etc. The last part of the manuscript, viz., from pp. 214-269, contains the account of a journey to France undertaken in 1719, by a certain Sa'id Basha, Turkish Ambassador to that country. Our manuscript is not the original, but a fairly well written copy made of the original by a certain Gabriel ibn Joseph Qurmuz, in the year 1819, and belongs to the Maronite Hanna ibn Diyab, of Aleppo.

The author of the journey was a Catholic priest of the Chaldean Church, of the diocese of Mossoul in Mesopotamia. His full name

appears as Father Elias, the son of Father Hanna, the Mausulite (*i. e.*, from Mossoul), and of the family of Beth-'Ammûda.

Our traveller started his journey from Bagdad in 1668 with the avowed intention of visiting the Holy Land, and, after spending some time in the city of Aleppo, he sailed from Alexandretta to Italy. From there he journeyed to France, Spain, Portugal, Sicily and again to Spain. Having obtained the proper credentials from the Holy See and from the Spanish government, he sailed from Cadiz to America and, after a voyage of fifty-five days, landed at Carthagena in South America. From there he travelled through Panama and almost the whole western coast, through Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile, whence he returned, in 1680, to Lima, in Peru. It was in this last city that our traveller composed the narrative of his journey, which forms the first part of the work. In 1680, he travelled through Mexico and Central America, where he spent a considerable time. In 1683, he started his journey back to Spain and Rome, where he was cordially received by Pope Innocent XI.

Of the author nothing else is known. The object of his journey, judging from the few vague allusions in his narrative, seems to have been that of collecting funds for the poor and needy churches and dioceses of his country.

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